



**IRAN: Canadian-Iranian blogger detained**

The Writers in Prison Committee of PEN Canada has serious concerns about the detention of Iranian-Canadian journalist and weblogger Hossein Derakhshan, who has been held by the Iranian authorities since November 1, 2008. The reasons for his detention are unclear – he is not thought to have been formally charged – and his whereabouts remain unknown. PEN Canada fears that Derakhshan has been detained because of the peaceful exercise of his right to free expression, in violation of Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory. It calls for his immediate and unconditional release and urgently seeks assurances of his well-being.

**BACKGROUND:**

According to PEN Canada's information, Hossein Derakhshan was arrested at his family home in Tehran on November 1, 2008 shortly after his return to Iran from several years' work and study in Canada and the United Kingdom. His detention was not officially acknowledged until December 30. Initial reports suggest that Derakhshan was accused of 'spying for Israel', apparently because of a highly publicised trip he had made there in 2006, travelling on a Canadian passport. Derakhshan undertook his trip to Israel in defiance of a ban by the Iranian government – which does not have diplomatic relations with Israel. "Too bad, I don't care," he later wrote, "I'm a citizen of Canada and I have the right to visit any country I want."

Derakhshan hoped his visit to Israel "as a citizen journalist and a peace activist" would "humanize Israel for Iranians and tell them it's not what the Islamic propaganda machine is saying - that Israelis are thirsty for Muslim blood . . . [and] show Israel that the average Iranian isn't even thinking about doing harm to Israel. I want them to see Iranians who don't look like Ahmadinejad." However, it has also been suggested that he faces accusations of 'insulting religion' in his weblogs.

As a pioneering weblogger, nicknamed 'the Blogfather', the thirty-four year-old Derakhshan is best known for his online diaries which are published in both English and Farsi. These have been critical of the Iranian authorities though more recently have been sympathetic to President Ahmadinejad. In November 2007, Derakhshan told the Ottawa Citizen that he was worried about the demonization

of Iran in the West and had "ceased all criticism of his homeland in English". He justified this decision by saying "We should keep our internal problems to ourselves for a while until the threat is gone."

Derakhshan moved to Toronto with his then-wife in 2000, after several newspapers for which he wrote in Tehran were closed by hardline opponents of the moderate former Iranian president, Mohammad Khatami. When he returned to Iran in 2005, to cover the presidential elections, he was prevented from leaving and detained by police. According to the London Times, "They told him that his blog was addressing too many taboo subjects and chided him for helping Iranians to skirt Internet censorship. He was allowed to leave after being forced to sign an apology."

Derakhshan is currently being held incommunicado at an unknown location, and there are mounting concerns for his well-being.

**Read:**

*Visiting Israel, breaking a major taboo* – Derakhshan's rationale for his 2006 trip to Israel: <http://hoder.com/weblog/archives/014928.shtml>

*The 'blogfather' of Iran*: November 2008 article on Derakhshan in the International Herald Tribune:  
<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2008/11/21/opinion/edrabinovich.php>

**Appeal Letter:**

His Excellency

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh/Office of the Head of the Judiciary

Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhuri, Tehran 1316814737

Islamic Republic of Iran.

Your Excellency:

I write to you as a member of PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of International PEN, the writers' organization with 145 centres in more than 100 countries worldwide, to share my concerns about the detention of Hossein Derakhshan.

According to PEN Canada's information, Mr. Derakhshan has been detained since November 1, 2008 and is being held incommunicado at an unknown location.

My colleagues and I are deeply concerned by reports that Mr. Derakhshan has been held because of opinions expressed on his popular weblog, Editor: myself (<http://hoder.com/weblog/>) and that he is being punished for exercising his fundamental right to free expression under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory.

We are further concerned that Mr. Derakhshan's arrest has taken place amidst a larger crackdown on internal dissent, which has included the harassment of human rights defender and Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi.

We call for Mr. Derakhshan's immediate and unconditional release and urgently seek assurances of his well-being.

Sincerely,

[your name and signature]

**Please fax or email copies of your appeal to the following:**

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh/Office of the Head of the Judiciary

Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhouri, Tehran 1316814737

Islamic Republic of Iran.

Email: [info@dadgostary-tehran.ir](mailto:info@dadgostary-tehran.ir) (in the subject line write: FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie

Ministry of Intelligence,

Second Negarestan Street,

Pasdaran Avenue,

Tehran,

Islamic Republic of Iran.

Salutation: Your Excellency

Embassy of Islamic Republic of Iran

Bahram Ghasemi

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Salutation: Dear Mr. Ghasemi

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